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# Klondike Days

By

MARTHA LOUISE BLACK,  
O.B.E., F.R.G.S.

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## *Klondike Days*

*By*

**MARTHA LOUISE BLACK,**

**O.B.E., F.R.G.S.**



## YUKON AND HER FLOWERS

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Since the first discovery of gold in sensational quantities was megaphoned to a startled world in 1898, Yukon, or as it was then called, the Klondike, has intermittently been front page news. It may have been the O'Brien murders, or the one and only hold-up in a Dawson dance-hall, the enormous number of men per capita of the population who enlisted to serve King and Country in the First Great War, the discovery of fabulously rich silver-lead ore in the Mayo-Wernecke district, or, more recently, the epoch-marking flights of Wasson and Walsh in their aerial search for the Burke party, with the discovery rewarding their labours of Burke dead, his two companions living. But all these and other stories feature that northland as grim, forbidding, treacherous and cruel. Nowhere do we find mention of the fish-teeming lakes, the game-trodden forests, or the mountains, plateaus and natural pastures covered with the most abundant and beautiful flora of the North American Continent.

The most thickly-settled community may be cruel to the ignorant, the idle or the

helpless, but in Yukon there is always a living for the man who works and who studies her moods. There is wood for the cabin and fire for the cutting, there are fish for the angler, birds of the air and big game for the sportsman, while to the farmer the soil is rich in potentialities. All who know how and are willing to work, given ordinary health, may wrest more than a good living from this country.

In the days of '98, when we were climbing the sheer and slippery sides of the Chilkoot, our thoughts dwelt only on the gold to be plucked from the grass roots, though it was at Dyea in the spring of that year that I first saw the wealth of blue iris that carpeted the lower hillside and flats of that temporary, tented town. From then on I was always on the lookout for flowers that were strangers to the mid-west and eastern mind.

In no way pretending to scientific botanical knowledge, I have grown to know, and love, the flora of the Yukon, and in one year it was my good fortune to gather, press and mount 464 varieties of flowers and ferns, classifying them with the assistance of friends. To Dr. Macoun and Dr. Malte I owe a debt of gratitude for their patience with my ignorance, while I can never forget the kindness shown me by Mrs. Julia Hen-

shaw the summer I spent in the mountains of British Columbia making a collection of mountain flowers for the Canadian Pacific Railway Company.

As a child I was a dreamer and oft-times emulated Robert the Bruce by watching the industrious spider, though failing to develop much industry myself. In the course of time I became the despair of my teachers and especially of dear old Sister Sophia of the Holy Cross, who tried so hard to teach me the scientific part of botany. Finally finding it was hopeless she suggested that the making of an herbarium might be a pleasure instead of a hardship. Like a stone cast into a pond the thought thus given my youthful mind broadened and widened through the years until today the greatest pleasure I have is following out the work that, for want of a better name, I have called Artistic Botany.

The coast of Alaska, as well as the interior of that territory, and Yukon, are prolific with Arctic and mountain flora.

Back of Juneau, at the foot of a great glacier, there are acres of the silvery swamp or cotton grass, as well as the rarer golden beige, while bordering the road from Juneau for fifteen miles the ground is covered with blue lupine and the edges of the small



streams crowded with the dainty blue forget-me-not. It may interest some of my readers to know that in Texas the lupine is known as the Bluebonnet, and is the official flower of that state.

In Skagway the flats bordering the small streams that cross and recross the town are crowded with the golden glory of the marsh marigold, with blossoms in many instances the size of the yellow pond lily.

The chocolate or bronze lily, one of the fritillarias, grows in profusion on the outskirts of the town. It is, though, as the White Pass train climbs above the old trail of '98 that one notices the change in the flora, gradually leaving behind the growth of the coast with its sumach, wild raspberries, currants, the scarlet and yellow of the swaying, feathery columbine, the lilies and sedges, and find instead the ground covered with heather (why do botanists call it "false"?) the ground pinks and a wide range of saxifrage.

Early in March in Yukon the first harbingers of spring are to be found in the soft willow buds, or "Pussy will yours," as a tiny friend of mine once called them. For three or four weeks the flower-seeker must perforce be content with these dainty pieces of down, but from early April there will be no

limit to the floral surprises to be found in this golden Yukon.

No rocky pile must be deemed too forbidding, for oft-times, sheltered by the sun-kissed side of some giant's footstool, will be found our first spring flower, locally called Purple Crocus, but in reality the dainty pasque flower (*Anemone Nuttalliana*), so commonly found in May in the valleys of the Canadian Rockies near Banff. The flowers are like the ordinary garden crocus in appearance, save that they are protected from inclement weather by a soft hairy down. The peculiarity of this member of the crowfoot family (*Ranunculaceae*) is the growth of the foliage after the flower has blossomed. As the purple sepals fade and fall the seeds form, and then the head presents a beautiful plumose appearance, for to each seed is attached a long, silky tail, the whole forming a pretty feathery tuft.

Closely following the pasque flower I have found eleven other members of the *Ranunculus* family, varying in size and colour from the tiny yellow water crowfoot, commonly skirting edges of sluggish streams and pools, to the longfruited *Anemoneae*, with dainty white blossoms shading into delicate greens, blues and pinks.

The floral colours of the north are largely blue, pink and magenta, with a generous touch of yellow in the arnica, shrubby cinquefoil, marsh marigold, yellow pond lily, Arctic poppy, mustard, golden corydales, yellow violet, vetch, Drummond's *Dryas* (both white and yellow), loco weed, stonecrop, ragwort, hawkweed, monkey flower, and many other blossoms whose names are familiar to all.

The dandelion in Yukon, as elsewhere, is ubiquitous, while in many places the eastern buttercup has in recent years grown, spread and thrived. Both flowers were probably brought in with bales of hay and other fodder.

In all my rambles throughout the Yukon I have never found genuinely scarlet flowers. I do not say that such colours do not exist there, only that I have not found them. The Indian paint-brush that on the prairies and in British Columbia ranges in colour from a brick red to a beautiful cherry is in Yukon either a sickly yellow or a homely magenta, while the columbine is with us usually blue and lemon, though I have found a sport of purest white.

In June acres of ground from Carcross to Forty Mile are covered with purple blue lupine with an occasional pale pink or pure white sport, the wild arctic poppy (a pale

lemon colour) and the Jacob's ladder, most unkindly called "skunkweed" from the disagreeable odour.

On the higher hills between Keno and Wernecke the dainty mountain forget-me-not grows cheek by jowl with the pink snakeweed (*polygonium bistorta*), the mountain harebell, the brilliant cerise shooting star and the shrinking *penguicula* (frequently mistakenly called "mountain violet.")

Lower down the mountainside the saucy Dutchman's breeches, the bleeding heart, a tiny prototype of the cultivated variety we all knew in our grandmother's garden, all these and many more are upon us in a bewildering array as soon as summer sets in with almost twenty-four hours of daylight.

The pyrolas, or shin plants, are exquisite in their waxen beauty, the single star blossom alone (*moneses uniflora*) giving forth an almost intoxicating fragrance.

The tiny twin flower, or *Linnaea*, the favourite of *Linnaeas*, the "Father of Botany," carpets our woods and perfumes the air.

If one enjoys watching a floral cannibal at work during the drowsy summer days when tiny midges are in the air, then the sundew (a distant relative of the Venus's



flytrap) will give ample amusement. The small, flat leaves of the plant are thickly covered with long sticky hairs that reach forth and gather the unwary midge, literally sucking the life fluid from the unfortunate insect while the leaves bloat and swell during the banquet.

An almost infinite variety of vetches intrigue the eye, from the golden rock vetch to the wonderfully brilliant magenta flowering vine that makes such vivid spots of colouring along the banks of the Yukon during the months of June, July and August.

One cannot speak of the flowers of the Yukon without making special mention of the great variety of orchids to be found there, the most common being a white orchis with large purplish-pink splotches. It grows on sandy, sunny hillsides as well as on lower levels, usually one flower on an erect stem with two or three sheath-like leaves.

The Siberian orchis, or Franklin lady-slipper, so called as it was first named botanically by the botanist of one of the Franklin expeditions, is not so attractive. The sac without its pure white, within covered with purple spots, small, irregular, while the overhanging lip is green but the two wings are pure white.

There is an occasional pure white orchid, an exquisite single flower exhaling a faint

though delicious fragrance, surrounded by long, acute bright green leaves, a rare find even for the experienced botanist. I came just once upon a clump of three of the blossoms.

The fragrant bog orchid, the fly-spotted orchis, the dainty little coral root, the lady's tresses and the Calypso (said to have arisen from the tears shed by the goddess over the departure of the fickle warrior Ulysses) all grow within a few minutes' walk of Dawson, and many of them just under the frowning brow of the "Slide" around which so many mystic tales are woven.

Exquisite mosses cover the ground everywhere but none more beautiful than the *splachnum buteum*, the moss growing in thick short masses, while the tiny yellow floret rises to a height of from one to ten inches on a red hair-like stem. Lucky indeed is one to discover such a treasure.

The thoughtful housewife stocks her winter larder with jellies, jams and preserves made from the fruits that grow wild in great profusion all over the territory; strawberries, currants, blueberries, three varieties of the low cranberry, as well as the high bush cranberry, red raspberries, roseberries and gooseberries. The preserve made from ripe wild rose hips equals the guava jelly.

Do you like mushrooms? Then come to the Yukon where huge pailsful may be gathered in the early summer morning hours. There are no poison weeds or flowers to disturb us in that country.

It is with a feeling of sadness that in late July we look over the distant hill and mountain sides and see the gorgeous magenta-purple of the great fireweed colour the entire landscape, border the roads and trails, for that flower more than any other tells us that "winter comes."

To tell the story of flowers to be found in Yukon would be to paint a pen picture that would tax the belief of those who have not seen, but to the traveller within our magic land I would say: "Pause, and while you are listening to the golden story that our dredges and hydraulics pour forth, stop a moment to heed the mystic tale of the birds, the butterflies, and most of all the flowers that spread their vivid colourings on the summer landscape, from the glory of the early pasque flower, the fragrant wild rose, the lilies and orchids of our valley to the day when autumn draws a curtain of yellows and scarlets over the country soon to be covered with the diamonds and crystals of the northern winter."

## FEATHERED BEAUTIES OF THE YUKON

### *Bird Life in Far North Plentiful in Summer — Arrival of Migratory Flocks One of Noted Sightings in Springtime*

While life lasts the sight of a robin redbreast will have power to conjure up thoughts of a beautiful apple orchard with trees loaded down with bloom, while each fragrant laden breeze caught the snowy petals and spread them over the grassy slope. Here, there and everywhere the robins sang unafraid and happy, dressed in the latest style of feathers and color, the scarlet vest setting off to perfection an otherwise sombre appearance.

Once I recall laughing aloud as a down-curved petal settled saucily on Master Robin's head and how pertly he looked at me as though to say, "My hat is the very latest—do you doubt it?"

And so one morning, when I was awakened by the impatient call of a distressed mother robin instead of the Yukon before me I was again in my grandfather's old orchard. But it was only for a moment, as



the voice grew more insistent I began to take notice, and wonder whether a stray cat we had seen prowling about for a few days past had captured one of the new robin family that had been raised in the balm of Gilead tree just in front of the house. But no, for suddenly I saw the mother robin perched on the verandah rail, and on the back of the rocking chair was the cause of all her misery merrily swaying to and fro in the breeze, quite indifferent to the anxiety his new occupation caused his mother.

After a few moments the young bird decided to investigate further afield, and, with a flutter or two of inexperienced wings, was soon on the foot-rail of the porch bed looking wisely at me as if to say, "This is the biggest nest I have ever seen, and I wonder what sort of a bird you are."

This summer the old birds brought up two families in the same nest, rather an unusual occurrence, I believe.

Someone may say, "Robins in the Klondike—I can hardly believe it." The alien idea regarding Yukon is that in summer it is a land of the "Midnight Sun" shining down on perpetual snow and ice, where the pine trees are always a-glitter with their burden of crystal and golden nuggets.

Instead of such scenes our forests in summer are carpeted with grass, ferns, mosses and myriads of beautiful wild flowers. Commencing with the white, yellow and purple violets of early spring and changing to many other varieties throughout the gorgeous three-months long summer day that is all bright daylight and mostly all sunlight. Is it any wonder that the flowers bloom, the birds come to build their nests and the tourists to marvel at our sunshine?

Among the smaller birds that are Yukon summer visitors are the beautiful western bluebirds that seem to prefer nesting close to human habitations, returning in larger numbers each year to their chosen spots.

The junco, ground sparrow, yellow warbler, several of the thrushes, redpolls, robins and blackbirds arrive in great flocks each spring to mate, nest, rear their young and follow the sunshine south before Jack Frost put in his appearance in the fall. With them come the martins, bank swallows to nest in thousands along the river banks, cliff swallows, barn swallows and chimney swifts. These various swallows are the first of all the birds to start the southern migration. They do not drift away by degrees as most of the other birds seem to do, but one fine morning about the first of August they may

be seen gathering in swarms on telephone and telegraph wires and suddenly, as if at some mysterious word of command, the flight takes the air and these birds are all gone to be seen no more until the following spring.

As elsewhere in Canada, very few small birds remain with us throughout the winter. Some of those that have no fear of the long, cold, dark days and nights of November December and January are the little black water ousels that flit about any bit of open water, even with the thermometer 60 degrees below zero, just as jauntily as in the mild weather; chickadees, snow buntings (flocks of them), the Arctic three-toed wood pecker, the northern hairy woodpeckers, while occasionally may be seen the northern pine grosbeak crossbills and the Bohemian waxwing.

Big black ravens we have always with us, while the Canada jay, or "camp robber," is all his name implies, committing his depredations before one's very eyes with no fear of the law in his heart, putting in an appearance from nowhere in particular when the camp fire is started or the slightest sign given that there is to be something to eat. These birds become very tame, and if care is taken not to startle them will perch on

one's hand to be fed bacon rind, bread or almost anything in the way of food.

The local game birds that do not migrate are several varieties of ptarmigan, sometimes called Arctict grouse, the winter plumage of the willow ptarmigan is almost pure white, the tips of the tail feathers and wing quills alone being black; while the rock ptarmigan is pure white in winter. In summer these birds are a mottled brown and white, their plumage blending with the rocks and brush, and the snows of winter thus affording them concealment, about the only protection they have from their natural enemies—hawks, owls, ravens, gulls and coyotes.

Like the grouse, the ptarmigan build their nests flat on the ground, lay a dozen to fifteen eggs and fall easy victims to the marauders that are now noticeably thinning their ranks.

A few years ago it was no uncommon sight to see flocks of hundreds of these beautiful birds distributed above timber-line, pretty much all over the mountains of the country. Today by comparison they are rare.

Other species of the grouse family abundant in Yukon are the ruffed grouse, the gamiest and most beautiful of all the grouse family; the Canada Grouse, common-



ly called spruce grouse and fool hen; the Richardson grouse, locally known as the blue grouse, a fine bird weighing from five to six pounds and frequenting the heavily timbered mountain sides, plumage of a dull greyish blue. In some localities, the Columbian sharp-tailed grouse, or prairie chicken, is found; but it is only occasionally seen in large numbers.

With these permanent residents of Yukon, and waging continual war upon them, we have many species of hawks and owls; the Pacific horned owl, snowy owl, great grey owl, northern spotted owl, saw-whet owl, and the pygmy owl.

The Alaskan bald eagle and the golden eagle frequent the high cliffs along the rivers, and, with the western goshawk, duck hawk, gyrfalcon, pigeon, hawk, sparrow hawk prey upon the game and song birds, as well as on the smaller rodents.

Many years ago I saw seagulls in flocks following the plough on farms just outside the city of Los Angeles and I was surprised that the birds which in my mind had always been associated with the sea had ventured even those few miles inland; but since then by observation I have learned more about gulls. Many thousands of the gulls make their way hundreds of miles in to the interior

of both Alaska and the Yukon, nesting on the river islands and sand bars in ever increasing numbers, so that it is now common knowledge among miners, trappers and prospectors of those territories that the gulls are responsible for the wanton destruction of countless game birds each year. Ducks' nests are regular lunch counters for these voracious birds, and they impartially gobble up eggs and young ducklings. Often I have seen a gull swoop down on a mother duck with a flock of little ones, seize the tiny downy chaps and devour them. They comb the mountainside for ptarmigan and grouse eggs and are so ravenous that they break down the mud nests of cliff swallows and devour the young birds.

Seagulls may be of some use along the coast and in the harbours as scavengers (I doubt it) but among nesting game birds they are a terrible menace—worse than crows—and though the killing of crows is encouraged by game conservationists the same authorities in their wisdom protect the murdering gull.

In spring, when the ice-locked rivers are gradually released from the grip of winter and water begins to show around the edges of the lakes under the rays of an increasingly longer stay of the sun, the northern flight

of the migratory birds begin to arrive. A few stragglers at first, usually mallard drakes are the advance guard, but the main flight is as regular as clockwork. It never comes in Yukon until the ice moves out of the Klondike River about the seventh of May. At daybreak that morning, the sky is literally lined with flock on flock of Canada geese, sandhill cranes, swans, cackling geese, mallards, pintails, widgeon, teal, mergansers, bluebills, harlequin ducks, shovellers, or spoonbills, old squaw ducks, butter balls, gold eyes, and, last of all, the old black surf scooters.

Of the teal, green wings prevail; only an occasional blue wing is seen; the same is true of the canvasback and red-head, a few come by but so few that it indicates their line of flight in the spring and fall migration is not by way of the valley of the great Yukon River.

Eider ducks with us are rare. Occasionally a pair of King eiders are observed — the drake gorgeous in bluff, ashy blue, Nile green, white, black and orange markings, while as befits his meeker companion, her plumage is less colorful, of shaded browns and blacks, but none the less beautiful.

The wood duck, most handsomely marked of all Canadian ducks, is not plentiful, but

is to be seen in about the same proportions as elsewhere.

Many of these birds stop to rest and feed, some to nest, but the great flight goes on further north into the Yukon flats, above the Arctic Circle and all over the Arctic slope of the continent.

The flight is a wonderful sight, but to see it one must be up betimes. Daylight comes about two o'clock in the morning. Before it is light enough to distinguish individual birds, one hears the swish of onrushing wings and sees the shadowy forms against the sky. The geese and cranes keep up a continual honking and calling. Most of the ducks fly silently, but when about to alight for rest and food the widgeons make a peculiar, almost musical sound.

Usually at the beginning of the flight, the males and females come in separate flocks, all in perfect plumage, every feather shining and in place. Toward the end, and this stream of birds flows on every morning until nearly the last of May, mixed flocks and pairs put in an appearance.

Each morning the flight lasts but a few hours. It is fast and furious while it lasts, but is all over by five o'clock. For the rest of the day scarcely a bird is seen in the sky,



and the uninitiated would never guess what wonderful sights are to be seen at the break of day.

Following right along behind the bigger birds come swarms of plover of various kinds, jack snipe, dowitchers, sand-pipers and waders. They swarm over the marshes and fields for a few days, then go further north to nest under the "Midnight Sun."

In the old times, before we had waked up to the necessity of protecting our migratory birds and spring shooting with no bag limit was the order of the day, on many a morning I have crawled out of a warm, comfortable camp bed to join my husband in the duck-blind before daylight, have watched the slow change in the sky, midnight blue, battleship grey, silver, rose, and turquoise, while listening to the weird sounds the earth seems to make as the darkness gives place to light before the sky turns vividly crimson and a red-faced sun begins the day's work in melting away the last vestige of snow and ice left to remind us of the winter we have just come through.

With the break of day came the birds, flock after flock of them tearing into the decoys. Did I shoot? Not often; I was much too interestd in watching the others.

We were never game hogs; we killed a few for sport and took some home for the neighbours.

Today the flight has appreciably diminished, not because of the numbers killed at any time by Northern hunters. There are more ducks slaughtered in California at any one of the gun clubs in one day than are killed in a whole season in the North. Just as soon as the birds are able to fly, and that is by the 10th of August, they begin to leave the Northern Country and By September first—which under the Migratory Birds Act is the opening of the shooting season—they are nearly all gone.

The place to see the migratory birds of the West at their best is in the valley of the Yukon, where they come in the spring in their very newest and best dress, prepared to make love and go to housekeeping.

I must not forget to draw your attention to the humming-birds of which I have seen the ruby throat and golden green in my Dawson garden. I have often fastened bits of scarlet or yellow silk about the necks of tiny glass test-tubes, filled them with honey, or syrup, and water, and hung them on the vines over my verandah. Within an hour I have counted seven of the tiny humming beauties fluttering about those artificial pos-

ies, returning again and again to drain the nectar-filled tubes.

Visitors from other lands and climes must of necessity change their opinions of Yukon when visiting there for the first time and observing not only the wonderful flora of the country but the bird and animal life as well.

## WAS IT THE CURSE?

"A curse on this boat. I put bad luck on her."

These words, shouted by a white-bearded old man standing on the deck of a big Yukon River steamer, while shaking his fist at the pilot-house, attracted my attention as I stepped out of my cabin.

"I am the seventh son of a seventh son, and woe be to those on whom I put my spell."

On engaging the old man in conversation a little later, I found him terribly in earnest in his belief that he possessed the power to bring down good or evil upon others. He felt he had a grievance against the owners of the boat concerning some claim for damages, his anger just then fanned to a flame against the ship's captain for having him forcibly ejected from the wheelhouse, where he had gone, in a not-too-sober condition, to tell his troubles, just when the skipper was busy giving orders for the start on the long upstream voyage from Dawson.

I left the boat next morning a few miles above Dawson and gave the incident no further thought until one day in the early fall Yukon was startled by the telegraphic



message: "Steamer Columbian blown up. Crew burned to death. Doctors and nurses being rushed to the wreck."

It was a beautifully warm, sunny day—one of those glorious days of northern Indian summer. All nature seemed forgetful of the fast-approaching winter, and, drowsing comfortably, disregarded the warning of the frost on the tinted leaves that made the forests glow. The brilliancy of the autumn tints rivalled the golden nuggets hidden away in the hills. The only sound to disturb the warm autumn silence was the exhaust of the broad-beamed old river packet as her slowly-turning paddle wheel gave her just enough way to enable the pilot to keep her in the current that was placidly and swiftly slipping away to the Arctic. Those who have been in the Far North will recall just such golden days.

There were no passengers aboard the boat, for she was carrying a cargo of explosives and gasoline, as well as shoving a large barge laden with the same stuff. Piled high in the bow of the steamer and barge were innocent enough looking boxes, loaded out there to be away from the boilers and machinery, carefully covered with tarpaulins, all containing powder and dynamite for the mines.

Suddenly out of the silence rang a sharp report, then a crashing roar that shook the old boat from stem to stern. A thoughtless boy had been idly watching a flock of ducks alternately swimming and flying in the neighbourhood of the steamer, and forgetting for a fatal moment the cargo, rushed for his shotgun and fired, with the result that one of the boxes was hit and the boat wrecked.

The poor boy paid the penalty of his forgetfulness with his life.

The pilot-house and fore part of the upper deck were lifted and hurled back amidships, the bone-dry woodwork burst into flames almost as quickly as the powder itself. Clouds of black smoke enveloped the ship.

What of the stokers, the crew and those in the pilot-house? Most of them were killed by the shock of the explosion and the first burst of flame. Others, horribly burned, tried to crawl away from the fiercely-raging fire to the after part of the ship.

It was the captain's watch below. Thrown from his berth by the shock and met by fire and flame at the forward gangway, he managed to climb over the top work and through the manhole in the roof of the engine-room, where he found the engineer

at his post, despite the blistering heat and choking smoke. The steering gear put out of commission in the wreck of the pilot-house left the steamer to drift helplessly, turning round and round in the current; each time she headed into the breeze the flames roared further aft.

Climbing onto the beam, the captain shouted directions to engineer—the boat must be backed at all costs. By reversing the engines they tried to make that great stern wheel claw them into the bank. With the fire gaining fast every second, the two men expected the bursting of the boilers. Once the steamer grounded, but caught in the current drifted off, and again the flames, fanned by the breeze, licked aft to scorch them at their almost hopeless task, scorching, too, the poor burned men who lay in agony on the floor of the engine-room. At last the steamer was guided into one of the channels that wander from the main Yukon and flatten out on the islands that dot the river. There she came to rest.

With superhuman efforts, regardless of their own condition, the two men worked with feverish haste to save the living victims from the fire, till finally all the living were stretched out on the gravel bar.

Among those whose lives were first snuffed out by the burst of the explosion was the captain's son. Grief-stricken, well nigh, frantic, burned, exhausted though he was, the intrepid skipper, leaving the engineer to watch over the little band of sufferers, made his way through the forest to the nearest telegraph station, some fifteen miles distant. There the startled operator heard the story, quickly the news was flashed to the head office at Whitehorse, some two hundred miles upstream from that lonely little hut in the wilderness.

As the captain and the operator, carrying what crude comforts were available, made their way back to the wreck, the fastest boat in port was tearing down the river and across Lake LaBarge in a race against death. She was, alas, too late to save some, for, exposed to the autumn night and chilling fog, with absolutely nothing to restore their fast-sinking vitality and no covering to protect them, those poor broken bodies gave up the struggle.

The morning sun, clearing away the mist, looked down into that valley of death upon but few that ministering hands and gentle hearts could help. The souls of those poor charred, scarred bodies had passed into the Great Beyond.



The great water tragedy of the Yukon River thus passed into history, leaving a story of suffering magnificently borne and of courage never excelled.

I saw my white-bearded old friend months later, a broken man. With shaking hand on my arm and eyes dimmed with remorse, he whispered:

"God forgive me. It was my curse."

Was it the curse?

## THE WHITEST BOY IN SCHOOL

It was on a beautiful late March day, when I was sitting in the kitchen with a huge pile of boys' socks to mend. From time to time I looked up on the hillside, and it seemed to me possible to see the first blush of purple spring, and I thought to myself,

"It should be only a week or two now before we can go out on the hillside and gather the Pasque flower"—a flower I had always hoped would be chosen as the Territorial flower of Yukon.

It was not very long before my twelve-year-old son came in with two of his school-mates. I had prepared for them some sandwiches, and a good drink of cocoa, so that I was ready to welcome them. Instead of which, the boys came close to my chair, while my son Warren said,

"Mother, Harry Agee is dead."

Not being particularly interested in Harry Agee, I said in a casual voice,

"Well, that's too bad, my dear," and again he repeated,

"But Mother, I told you Harry Agee is dead."

As Harry Agee was an unusually homely coloured boy, I was not able to work up much enthusiasm, but again I said,

"I am very sorry, my dear," and again the repetition from my small son,

"But Mother, Harry Agee is dead, and I told my teacher you would send flowers for the funeral."

At that time in the north we had no fresh flowers, and it was an exception that any of us had any bulbs ready to bloom. I have never felt that I brought my boys up, but have always been convinced that they brought me up. So I said to the boy and his companions,

"I will make some paper flowers for you," only to receive the unexpected reply,

"But we don't want paper flowers, we want real flowers."

In those days in northern Yukon at that time of year there were no real flowers, nor could we get any from "outside" under ten days or two weeks, but remembering my thought of earlier in the afternoon, I said,

"Well, my dear boys, if you go up on the hillside and look around the protected and sheltered spots that have had the sun beat down on them, you may find a few of the Pasque flower or early crocus, and if so

try to fill the sugar sacks that I will give you, and I will fix up something that will please everyone."

In my cache I happened to have eight or ten yards of green mosquito netting. Remembering that, I thought to myself,

"In wonder if those children can possibly find enough of the flowers to make a pall for the coffin."

It was not very long before the boys returned, and jubilantly told me that they could get "millions" of the crocus. They were all brought into the house, and that night I sat up until the wee sma' hours sewing the tiny buds onto that green netting. Before going to bed in the morning I laid the pall on the kitchen floor, sprinkled it carefully, and hoped, almost against hope, that the warm room would bring out the flowers.

I was awakened early next morning by my boy calling,

"Mother, come and see, it's beautiful!" Going out into the kitchen, I looked on as lovely a sight as I had ever seen. The pall, that I had made was alive with hundreds of Pasque flowers, almost in full bloom. It was the work of a very short time before I was able to dig out a gorgeous mauve-coloured sash for a bow to be tied in one corner of

the pall. That morning before noon there were between twenty and thirty school-children coming in to look at the flowers "that Warren's mother made."

The pall was laid across the coffin of the "whitest boy in school." The funeral was all that the "whitest boy" could be given, and I do not believe that any small children before or since could have been any more delighted with the flowers, even had they been the most expensive orchids, than were those three boys who came to me that afternoon.

It is just as well to explain why Harry Agee was called the "whitest boy in school." He was sometimes passed up by the white boys, and that must have hurt, but when they were short of a player in any of the games they always fell back on Harry Agee, who was just as willing to help as though he had always been a member of the team. And so in death he received the tribute that should have been given before—"the whitest boy in school."

After the funeral I had a little talk with my son.

"Warren," I said, "please never again tell anybody before you talk with me that Mother will get flowers."

He looked at me enquiringly, and said calmly,

"But you got them, Mother."

"Yes," I said, "God had the flowers ready for us to find, but please do not tell anyone again what Mother can do."

Again that twelve-year-old boy looked at me with his deep blue eyes, saying,

"But Mother, you got the flowers."

There seemed to be nothing more for me to say, except that night when I was hearing his prayers I said,

"My dear, I think you should thank God for the flowers you and your friends brought in for me to arrange for Harry Agee's funeral."



## DECLARATION OF WAR IN YUKON

On that night, more than thirty years ago, when war was declared, the one moving picture house in Dawson, then the capital of Yukon, was crowded to the doors. The Commissioner and I were entertaining a box party, for far away in our northern home the voices of the song-birds and actresses of the great world could only be heard through the medium of the gramophone, while their acting seen on the screen was as much appreciated as though the frou-frou of Worth gowns and the murmur of voices were actually in evidence.

During an interval a telegram was handed to my husband, who read it and without comment passed it to me. The message was from the Secretary of State in Ottawa saying that England was in a state of war with Germany.

Our daily paper had been reporting, with huge scareheads, the diplomatic pour-parlers of the European world, but that war was so suddenly to pour forth a stream of blood, rapine, fire and famine no one dreamed.

George, (the Commissioner) went to the stage and after a perceptible pause, eloquent with suppressed emotion, read the cable. In silence men and women looked at each other aghast, trying to realize the significance of the words.

In the centre of the house about twenty scarlet-coated members of the Royal North West Mounted Police occupied seats. Two of the men, brothers, were former members of the Coldstream Guards, well over six feet in height, and both with fine voices. They looked at each other, whispered to other members of the force with them, rose to their feet and commenced singing "God Save the King." The effect was electrical; with one move the audience was on its feet and never in the world, I dare say, was the National Anthem sung with greater fervour or more depth of feeling than that night in the tiny mining village just on the edge of the Arctic.

After all, though nine thousand miles of mountains, land and sea separated us from London, the Heart of the Empire, yet England's King was our King, and England's Empire our Empire. We realized as never before that we were not English, nor Irish, nor Scotch, nor Welsh, nor yet Canadians, but that we were all British, bound together by the Anglo-Saxon ties of blood.

From week to week, from month to month after that memorable night men left the Yukon, often with packs on their backs, walking from four to six hundred miles to serve King and country. Not at the call of drum and bugle, not with the thrilling sight of magnificent battalions marching past to inspire them—no! only in response to that insistent small voice within that reminded one ever—"Your King and country need you."

• • •

An officer of the Yukon Motor Machine Gun Battery, after having served with conspicuous gallantry in France, with an M.C. to his credit, was sent to Bramshott Hospital. Preceding a necessary operation, while the name, next of kin, unit etc. were being noted, one of the M.D.'s present said, "Yukon, where's that?" to which an attendant replied, "Oh, I don't know, probaby somewhere in China." The patient, whose lack of vitality had previously given considerable anxiety, immediately raised himself from the bed and hoarsely shouted, "Hell! Yukon is in Canada, near the North Pole." The operation was successful.

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